

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Greeting customs vary according to age, ethnicity, and situation. Malays greet with the *salaam*: two people bring right palms together, as if to shake hands, and then slide them apart; each person then touches the palm to his or her heart.

Malays greet with *Selamat pagi* (Good morning), *Selamat petang* (Good afternoon), or *Selamat malam* (Good evening). More formal Malay terms include *Selamat sejahtera ke atas anda* (I wish you peace and tranquility) or the Muslim phrase *Assalam alaikum* (Peace be upon you).

Chinese names begin with the family name followed by a two-character given name. So, a single woman named Lee Hwi Chern is properly addressed by her full name or as *Miss Lee*. Many Chinese (especially Christians) adopt Western names, which come first. So Catherine Tan Leng Yan is *Miss Tan* but *Catherine* to her friends.

Malays have no surnames but instead use a given name followed by the father's given name. These are separated by *bin* (son of) or *binti* (daughter of): Daud bin Hakim (addressed as *Mr. Daud*) or Salmah binte Jufri (*Miss Salmah*).

Gestures:

In formal situations, Singaporeans cross legs at the knee; they do not rest an ankle on the knee. It is impolite to allow the bottom of the foot to point at a person or to use the foot to move objects.

Hitting the fist into the cupped hand or touching another person's head is impolite. One beckons by waving all fingers of the right hand with the palm facing down.

Finger gestures, such as pointing or forming the rounded “okay” sign, are considered rude. A slight bow when joining, leaving, or passing a group of people shows courtesy.

Holidays:

Public holidays include International New Year (1 Jan.), Chinese New Year (set by the Chinese lunar calendar), Easter (including Good Friday), *Vesak* Day (celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and *nirvana* of Buddha and held during the fifth lunar month), Labor Day (1 May), and Singapore National Day (9 Aug.).

Non-Chinese holidays include *Hari Raya Puasa*, a feast at the end of *Ramadan* (the month when Muslims go without food or drink each day from sunrise to sundown). Non-Muslims are welcome to join in *Hari Raya Puasa* as an expression of tolerance and renewal. Another Muslim festival, *Hari Raya Haji*, celebrates the pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. *Deepavali* (Festival of Lights) for Hindus and Sikhs celebrates the triumph of light over darkness.